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ABSTRACT

In this speech, the author attempts to determine the effect of the 45-15 calendar on changing family life patterns. Sixty families, whose children had been attending school under the 45-15 plan for two years, were randomly surveyed. The primary conclusion of the interview survey was that parents perceive year-round education to have only a minor impact on the social, religious, economic, family life style, and health activities of their families. The majority of parents polled perceived changes in vacation plans, better education, and increased exuberance of children for school attendance as the greatest products of year-round education. Increased costs for recreational and vacation activities and school clothes, and the boredom of children during the 15-day period off were the greatest negative results perceived. (Variable print shadings may produce poor copy.) (Author)

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE 45-15 CALENDAR FOR CHANGING FAMILY LIFE PATTERNS

A Paper Presented at the 1974 American Educational Research Association Meeting

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by

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE 45-15 CALENDAR FOR CHANGING FAMILY LIFE PATTERNS

This interview survey was conducted in the Spring of 1973 at Dale City, a residential planned community several miles from Washington, D.C. in Prince William County, Virginia. Three elementary schools and one middle school had been operating on the 45-15 calendar since June, 1971. At that time, the school system had the alternative of choosing double sessions and overcrowded conditions or the 45-15 plan. The 45-15 plan went into effect without the consent of the members of the community. Many parents were angry and newspapers reported much controversy.

The survey included sixty randomly sampled families in Dale City with children attending either the three elementary schools or the middle school on the new calendar plan. It was conducted two years after the inception of the 45-15 system. The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of the 45-15 calendar on changing family life patterns. It was also used to provide in-depth information on the effects of the 45-15 plan on family homeostatis and life style, changes in religious patterns, social mutations of parents and children which may create tension and precipitate stress, educational achievement, personal contact of the family with the schools, and the general health and well being of the family.

Sample: A table of random numbers was used to select sixty families for the study. Fifty-one families were interviewed in their homes on March 30, and March 31, 1973, in the areas of education, health, family life style, economics and religion. The instrument used contained questions

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drawn from feasibility studies, research studies and the literature on year-round education.

Profile information: Ninety-two percent of the parents interviewed were white. Eight percent were black. The average age of the mother was thirty-three, the fathers' was thirty-eight. The average combined yearly income was approximately $11,000 and only two percent of the parents were divorced. Most families had lived in Dale City more than two years and many of the fathers were connected with military or government occupations although most came from skilled or semi-skilled professions. Most parents had finished high school and some had college experience. Twenty-nine percent of the families interviewed were Protestant, forty percent were Catholic and thirty-one percent indicated other/none in the religion category.

CONCLUSIONS

Education: The parents in this study did not perceive the 45-15 plan as affecting the overall educational program of their children or their involvement with that program. Questions dealing with achievement, contact with the school, attendance at school meetings involvement in extra-curricular activities and return for tax money indicated no change in parents' perception of the new calendar plan. The majority of parents liked the plan including those who were against it in its inception. Main reasons for liking the plan were: (1) the "kids" were not bored, (2) parents had greater flexibility in scheduling vacations, (3) year round education was a better alternative than double shifts, (4) parents felt that it was easier for children to keep occupied for a fifteen day period and (5) parents felt that children would forget less in fifteen days than they would in three months.

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The few parents who disliked the plan were those families who had children in both the high school and the elementary schools in conflicting schedules. This disrupted family unity. They also mentioned a need to have the calendar available to them many months in advance to plan family vacations.

Family Life Style: Compared to the conventional nine - three calendar, the parents in this study did not perceive the new 45-15 calendar as significantly affecting the life style of their families. The majority of the families spent the same amount of time together, their friendships were not affected and they used parks and community facilities about the same as before the 45-15 plan became effective. Most parents indicated that their living pattern did not need readjustment, the calendar did not disrupt summer plans of the children, nor were the fifteen day breaks disruptive.

Difficulty in scheduling vacations were the same as before the inception of the new plan, yet, a significant portion of the families reported that they had less difficulty in scheduling vacations because of the increased flexibility the plan provided. The overwhelming majority of the parents indicated that they preferred the seasonal vacations the plan provided because of increased flexibility, cheaper rates and less crowded facilities during the seasons other than summer at vacation facilities and the greater opportunity they provided for a variety of activities. This is supported by the fact that families indicated more shorter and more frequent vacations were taken after the 45-15 plan went into effect. The median amount of days spent on vacations after the 45-15 calendar plan went into effect was eight days as compared to 11.5 days spent on family vacations before the 45-15

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plan, and fourteen percent of the parents indicated that they went on vacations in the months of September, October, November, and December more frequently than before.

An item which indicated that parents use community facilities and services about the same needs special explanation. The Dale City area, even though it is a planned residential area, does not make available to children, recreational activities and public services which are within walking distance. One question in the health section supports this, in that parents indicated overwhelmingly, that such services were not available. The responses to this question in all probability would be different in a residential area where such facilities and services should receive special consideration from school districts considering year-round education.

Friendships among children were not affected because children attend school by attendance areas. Some special concerns expressed by parents should be noted. Activities disruptive to the child's normal summer activities were summer camp, Bible camp and swimming. Even though this was a disadvantage, parents saw this as being partially resolved by rotating the calendar groups by attendance area.

Health: Compared to the nine - three conventional plan, the health of the children and health care of the family were not perceived as being affected by the majority of the respondents. No difficulty was perceived in answer to questions on opportunities to make trips to the dentist or doctor, attendance at school, getting along with teachers or peers and adjustment to the 45-15 schedule.

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The overwhelming majority of parents perceived their children to be eager and enthusiastic to return to school at the end of fifteen day period off. However, comments indicated that boredom, lack of things to do at home and a lack of recreational facilities may have influenced the eagerness for the children to return to school. The most prevalent activity mentioned to occupy children during the fifteen day break was "watching T.V." and playing in "the neighborhood with friends." Families recommended that facilities, such as an indoor swimming pool and additional playgrounds in each area by added. Although parents have requested these facilities, there is little space between houses for them.

Economic Aspects: No change was perceived by parents in costs for baby sitting, transportation, food costs for household, recreational activities or vacations and allowances. The only differences mentioned were slightly rising costs for school clothes, more frequent vacations and recreational activities. In some instances, costs went down for cheaper seasonal vacations and baby sitting costs which were absorbed by relatives and friends. No changes were indicated in parents' work schedules.

Religion: Compared to the conventional nine - three plan, the majority of parents indicated that their children attended religious and church recreational facilities about the same as before the 45-15 plan was adopted. A significant number of the respondents stated that religious attendance was not applicable to their life style. No changes were reported in the religious life of the sample due to the 45-15 plan.

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Summary: The primary conclusion of this interview survey was that parents perceive year-round education to have only a minor impact on social, religious, economic, family life style and health activities of their families. The majority of parents polled perceived changes in vacation plans, better education, and increased exuberance of children for school attendance as the greatest product of year-round education. Increased costs for recreational and vacation activities, school clothes and boredom of children during the fifteen day period off were the greatest negative results perceived by the parents of Dale City.